



MEMORANDUM

April 4, 2012

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Cindy Kebba, Planner III

VIA: David Levy, Chief of Long Range Planning

SUBJECT: *Rockville's Pike: Envision a Great Place* – Work Session #21
Sidewalks

Establishing inviting conditions for walking is one of the draft plan's Corridor Planning Principles. A successful sidewalk is more than a path for getting from one point to another; it is also a place to gather, browse shop windows, stand while waiting for a bus, eat at outdoor cafes, and rest on a bench. Just as streets perform multiple roles as public places and as vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian corridors, sidewalks perform multiple roles as well and can be destinations in and of themselves.

Staff strongly recommends that the design and location of sidewalks be treated as core elements of the Plan and the guideline documents for implementing the Plan.

Elements of a sidewalk

Typically, there are four “zones” contained in sidewalks in mixed-use areas. These are defined as the edge zone, amenity zone, pedestrian travel zone, and frontage zone.

That closest to the street is the edge zone. It is the interface between the roadway and the sidewalk. In active mixed-use areas, with on-street parking and ground floor retail activity, this zone should be at least 18 inches in width to accommodate the door swing of a parked car and to avoid conflicts with elements of the adjacent “amenity zone”.

The amenity zone is the primary buffer between the active pedestrian travel area and moving vehicular traffic. It contains the utilitarian fixtures of an urban street, which may include street trees, planting strips, street furniture such as benches, utility poles, parking meters, signs, fire hydrants, bike racks, trash and recycling receptacles, and outdoor restaurant seating. Locating these sidewalk components together in the amenity zone keeps them from being obstacles in the clear pedestrian travel zone. This zone also protects pedestrians from splashes and serves as a snow storage area after plowing.

The pedestrian travel zone is intended only for walking and should be entirely free of obstacles. The width of this zone should be calibrated to the level of activity expected; it should be wider in high-use sidewalks than in low-use sidewalks. Much of the literature indicates that 5 clear feet for walking is a minimum for sidewalks, except in low

density residential areas where more narrow sidewalks are acceptable. For locations with high pedestrian volumes, the preferred dimension is 6 to 8 feet, or more.

The frontage zone is the area adjacent to the build-to line that may be defined by a building façade, landscaping, a wall or fence. This is the area where pedestrians slow down to window shop as well as enter and exit buildings. Approximately 18-24 inches is needed to allow room for doors to open, a merchandise display, or possibly a bench against the building wall looking out onto the sidewalk. Architectural elements that encroach such as stoops may occupy this zone.

Draft Plan Recommendations for Corridor Sidewalks

The draft plan requires a minimum 15-foot-wide sidewalk along each side of Rockville Pike, located between the bike/transit lane in the access road and the building face (see figure 5.3 on page 5.4 of the draft plan). This minimum width is measured from face-of-curb to build-to line and is inclusive of landscaping, tree planters, lighting, street furniture, bus shelters, and other amenities. The 15-foot dimension along the Pike is divided between a combined 10-foot edge and furnishings zone (identified as “minimum planter width” on page 46 of the thoroughfare standards in the form code) and a 5-foot combined pedestrian and frontage zone.

The minimum sidewalk width for all other streets in the draft plan area ranges between 12 and 16 feet, each with a 7-foot amenity/edge zone that includes intermittent planters and tree wells, and between 5 and 9 feet for a combined pedestrian travel and frontage zone (see thoroughfare standards on page 47 of the form code). “A” streets have the widest pedestrian zones because they are meant to function as retail-based main streets. “B” streets have the narrowest pedestrian zones because they are primarily intended to provide local access and are not retail-oriented.

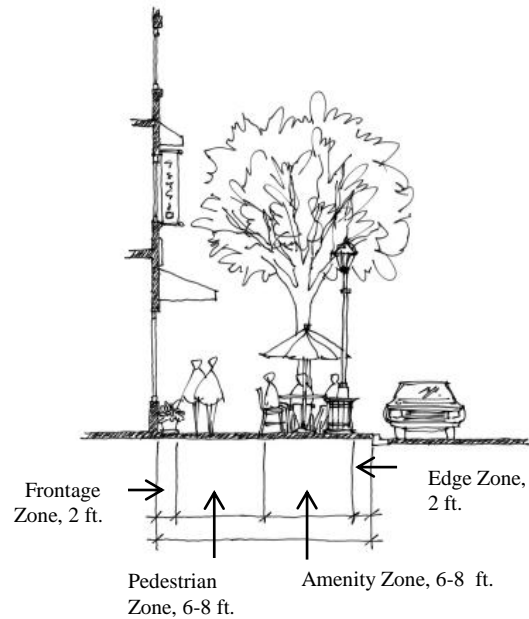
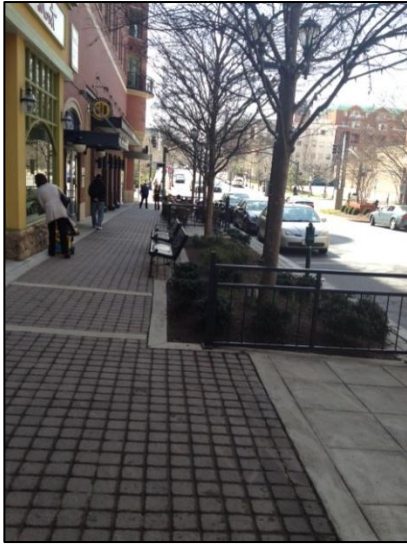
1989 Rockville Pike Plan Recommendations for Sidewalks

The 1989 Rockville Pike Corridor Neighborhood Plan called for “an improved pedestrian pathway system to provide safe, convenient access to all points of activity in the corridor”. Sidewalks along Rockville Pike were recommended to be 10 feet wide. Sidewalks in commercial areas were recommended to be 6-10 feet wide, and sidewalks in residential areas were recommended to be 4 to 5 feet wide, in accordance with City standards at the time. The current draft plan recommends sidewalks that are wider than these dimensions, as the general thinking about how sidewalks function has evolved since the 1989 plan was adopted.

Pedestrian overpasses and arcades were encouraged by the 1989 plan. In particular, the 1989 Rockville Pike Plan laid out elements for a promenade on the north side of Halpine Road to establish a strong pedestrian connection between the Twinbrook Metro Station and the commercial and residential neighborhoods west of Rockville Pike. The Halpine Promenade was envisioned as a 25-foot-wide walkway lined with shops, cafes, landscaping and public amenities. The 25 feet included a 5-foot planting strip, a 10-foot landscape feature (trees, ground cover and flower beds, interrupted to create seating niches and other spaces for pedestrian amenities), and a 10-foot sidewalk (minimum width). A continuous arcade (12-foot minimum depth) adjacent to the sidewalk was recommended to provide protection in inclement weather and open spaces, plazas and courtyards along the pedestrian walkway and arcade which would provide areas for sidewalk cafes and other points of focus. Retail uses would be oriented to the arcade to create a high level of pedestrian activity. The Halpine Promenade concept was never implemented, as redevelopment of the site north of Halpine between the Pike and Chapman Avenue, which would be most critical for implementation, has not occurred.

For Reference, Rockville Town Square

Sidewalks in Rockville’s Town Square are approximately 15 feet wide. The sidewalks feature an 8-foot combined pedestrian and frontage zone and a 7-foot amenity and edge zone that contains grated tree pits and landscaping. Space between trees can be used for outdoor tables and chairs. Shown at the top of the following page, left, is a photo of the sidewalk in Town Square along Maryland Avenue, looking south. To the right is a sketch from the Town Center Design Guidelines that illustrates a typical sidewalk envisioned for Town Square. The Guidelines note that dimensions may vary depending on location. The pedestrian zone in Town Square sidewalks gets “pinched” in some locations, particularly when amenity zone benches facing the stores are occupied and pedestrians are stopping to look into store windows.

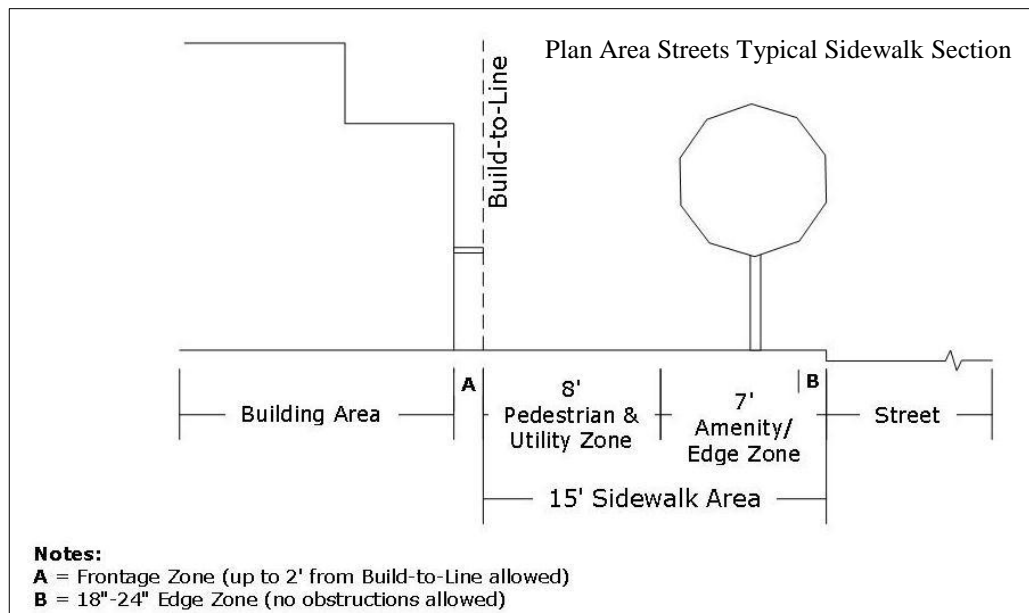


Staff recommendations

Plan Area Sidewalks

- With the exception of Rockville Pike, staff recommends that all streets in the plan area feature 15-foot sidewalks, in which 8 feet is free and clear for walking and the other 7 feet is an amenity/edge zone. This would be in addition to the allowed two-foot frontage zone behind the build-to line that staff also recommends, which is discussed below under General Recommendations. The 15-foot sidewalk width is comparable to the configuration in most of Town Square, shown above.

It should be noted that eight feet is the minimum width required for a public utility easement which could be located in conduit under the pedestrian zone. Utilities cannot be placed beneath trees. If utilities are not contained in conduit, they may need an additional two feet which could be provided in the optional two-foot frontage zone or by providing a wider (10-foot) pedestrian zone. However, staff considers 8 feet to be the optimal width for pedestrians on these streets.

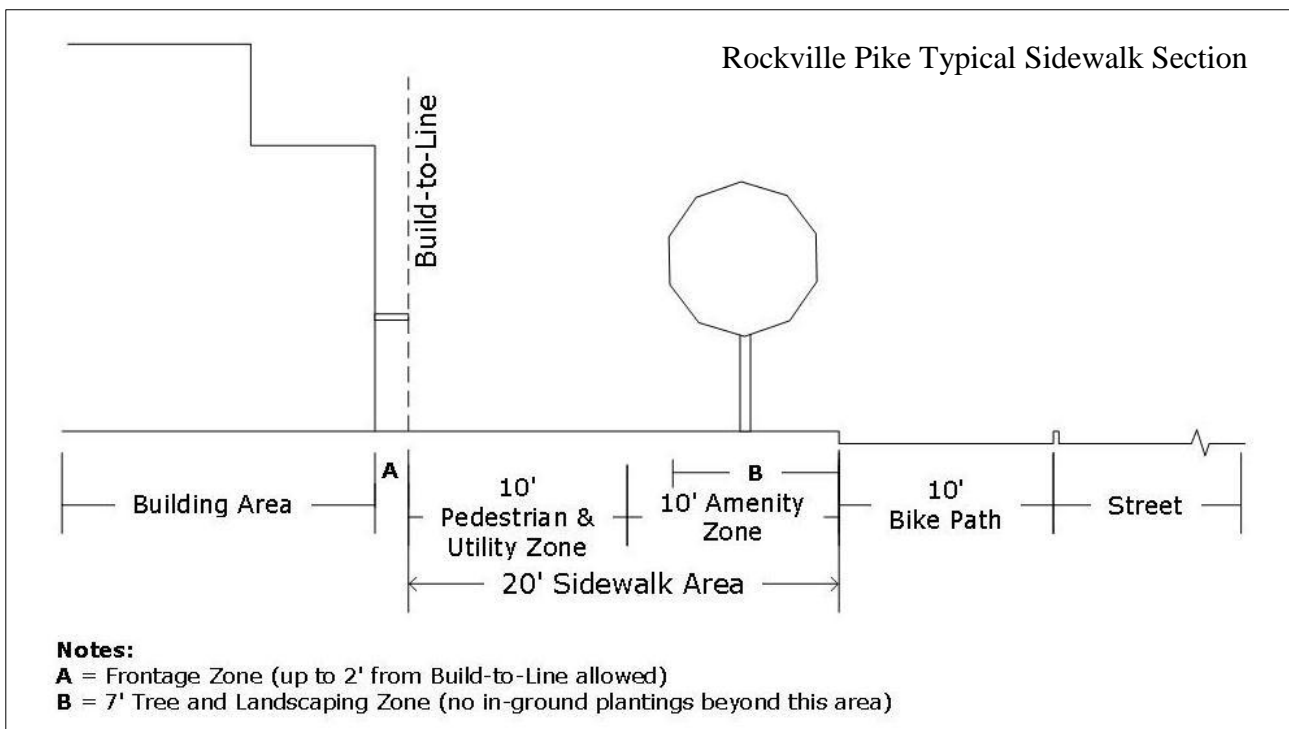


Rockville Pike

- Staff recommends a 20-foot-wide sidewalk, located on each side of the Pike between the bicycle path and the building facades. This width reflects the wider dimensions of the Pike and contributes to the open space recommended for the boulevard design.

Half of this width (10 feet) is recommended to be the pedestrian way. This is considered a sufficient width even for situations where building facades are located immediately at the build-to line rather than set back into the recommended two-foot frontage zone. Utilities could be placed under this portion of the sidewalk and also encroach into the portion of the adjacent amenity zone that does not have trees.

The other 10 feet is recommended for an amenity and edge zone to include a 7-foot-wide section for street trees. This 10-foot area could also accommodate street furnishings, street lights, bicycle storage, signs, outdoor seating, trash receptacles, etc. between trees. One and a half feet adjacent to the curb (edge zone) should be free of obstructions to allow for passenger side car door opening.



Halpine Road

- Halpine Road is a significant pedestrian corridor because of the location of the Twinbrook Metro Station and its utility as a pedestrian connection between the Pike and areas west of the Pike to the metro station is anticipated to increase in the future. This will increase demand for retail uses along Halpine. Staff believes that the sidewalk widths recommended for non-Pike streets (described above) will be sufficient to accommodate increased pedestrian activity on Halpine Road. However, staff recommends that the first story of building facades along Halpine (minimum of 15 feet) be allowed (but not be required) to be recessed up to 12 feet along Halpine to create pedestrian arcades, similar to those recommended in the 1989 Rockville Pike Plan. This would allow for special pedestrian treatment along this important side street.

General Recommendations

- Sidewalks should be on both sides of all streets in the plan area.
- A two-foot frontage zone should be provided along all streets in the plan area. This two-foot zone would be in addition to the sidewalk dimensions recommended above. Staff recommends that all street-fronting building facades in all frontage zones should be allowed to step back up to two feet from the build-to line to allow for bay windows and other façade articulation, planters, merchandise displays, benches, stoops, stairs, etc. The location of the build-to line would not change. The percentage of building façade at the build-to line would apply to the area within the two-foot frontage zone rather than to a set line. On the Pike, for example, at least 70% of a building façade would be required to be located somewhere within the two-foot frontage zone rather than exactly at the build-to line. The frontage zone would be privately-owned and maintained space adjacent to the public sidewalk and would allow for the functions that a frontage zone typically provides. This would reduce the potential for the “pinching” problem noted above in the Town Square example and allow the pedestrian travel zone to be obstruction-free.
- A streetscape manual should be developed as an implementation recommendation of the Rockville Pike Plan. The streetscape manual would be more detailed than the streetscape section that is in the draft form code (pages 70-72) and would include recommendations for paving materials, street lighting, furniture, trees, plant material and landscaping, signage, and bicycle parking.

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